

UPDATES TO RULES REGARDING PERMITS FOR THE USE OF BALLFIELDS AND COURTS

My name is Mike McCarthy and I am currently a member of the Board of Directors of West Side Little League and am the league secretary. In addition to my roles as an administrator for the league, I am a coach in our Majors division (10–12-year-olds) and of one of our travel teams (11u). I have been involved with West Side Little League for over 10 years and each of my three children currently play, or have played, either softball or baseball with West Side Little League.

I am writing today to provide my comments with respect to the proposed amendments to the requirements for groups and individuals applying to reserve baseball fields under the jurisdiction of the Department of Parks and Recreation (“Parks Department”).

West Side Little League is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit all-volunteer youth organization chartered by Little League Baseball. Our programs train youths to play baseball and softball on the westside of Manhattan. West Side Little League runs spring and fall recreational co-ed baseball and girls’ softball for children ages 6 through 18 and a program in the spring for special needs players ages 7 through 21. We also have travel programs for baseball and softball in the spring, fall and summer seasons. We serve roughly 1,000 participants between our spring and fall programs. Activities include team practices, games and training for our all-volunteer coaches. West Side Little provides scholarships for children who want to participate in our programs but cannot otherwise afford to do so.

While I applaud the Parks Department goals of (i) providing greater access for not-for-profit organizations that don’t have the resources that for profit organizations do, (ii) ensuring fair access to all, and (iii) streamlining the application process, I do have concerns that the proposed language may not achieve the desired results.

For our league to effectively teach our participants the game of baseball, we must have access to fields for practice. Practice is essentially in every sport for a player to grow and develop their skills. Based on the proposed language, for profit organization games will take priority over not-for-profit, local organization’s practice requests. In my opinion, the lack of practice time could have devastating effects on our little league (and likely, other youth sports organizations). If a player is not provided sufficient practice time, they will not grow and develop and as they get older will be inclined to leave the sport. We simply will not be able to compete with for profit baseball organizations that have indoor facilities that can host practices. We need access to fields for practice for us to serve our mission and our participants.

If we are required to only have games when we have field access will certainly lose participants and our fields will have less players on them! During a typical little league baseball game, we will only have 9 (or ten) players on the field at a time (the other team will be hitting) but during a practice, we can easily accommodate 30 or more players (perhaps even more, depending on the field).

I also want to point out that several fields have a seasonality component to them. As an example, in the fall, Central Park’s North Meadow fields (which include baseball and soccer fields) are exclusively used for soccer so, many baseball organizations lose several fields they have access to in the spring. As a result, we must ensure that the fields we have access to are used efficiently and effectively. If we are faced with losing field time to for profit organizations, even our games may be impacted.

I want to thank you for all the work you do for the residents of our city. As you discuss the proposed rule changes, I ask that you consider the important need for practice time and overall field access for youth based, charitable organizations such as ours.